



## ***Between uprooting and attachment. Rural youth and ICTs in Uruguay. A qualitative approximation.***

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### **Abstract**

Studies on access and use of ICTs have been mainly focused on the urban country. On the contrary, rural youth have been poorly considered in their specificity. The objective of this research was to present an approximation to the understanding of rural youth in Uruguay in order to contribute to their visibility on the public space. In this article, the results of a qualitative study of a group of rural Uruguayan youths, made up of ten high school students of Montes Agrarian School, are presented. The route that we propose begins with the presentation of a general panorama on the place of young people in the Uruguayan population and the access to communication technologies as well as the discussion of the categories of youth and rurality. The methodological design adopts a socio-anthropological approach in search of meanings rather than impacts, through the implementation of the qualitative interview. In the analysis, special and temporal dimensions of everyday life are explored;- leisure, study and work times;- sociability and representations and imaginaries about these technologies and projections about the future. The results of the research allow us to identify some keys to understand the needs of this population group. The relationships that are established around ICTs are presented in an ambiguous and conflictive way. The key to interpret them lies in a vital situation crossed by the tension between the imminent expectation of migration to the city and personal growth and the desire to return to the rural and family environment.

**Keywords:** Youth. Rurality. ICTs.

## **Entre el desarraigo y la querencia. Jóvenes rurales y TIC en Uruguay. Una aproximación cualitativa.**

### **Resumen**

Los estudios sobre acceso y uso de TIC se han concentrado fundamentalmente en el país urbano mientras que los jóvenes rurales han sido escasamente abordados en su especificidad. Esta investigación se propuso una aproximación a la comprensión de este sector poblacional en Uruguay con el fin de contribuir a su visibilidad en el espacio público. Se exponen aquí los resultados del estudio cualitativo de un grupo de jóvenes rurales uruguayos, compuesto por estudiantes de bachillerato agrario de la Escuela Agraria de Montes. El recorrido que proponemos parte de un panorama general sobre el lugar de los jóvenes en la población uruguaya y el acceso a las tecnologías de la comunicación, así como la problematización de las categorías de juventud y ruralidad. El diseño metodológico adopta un enfoque socioantropológico en busca de significados más que de impactos, utilizando la entrevista cualitativa. En el análisis se exploran dimensiones espaciales y temporales de la cotidianidad - los tiempos de ocio, estudio y trabajo-, la sociabilidad, las representaciones e imaginarios sobre estas tecnologías y las proyecciones sobre el futuro. Los resultados de la investigación permiten identificar algunas claves para comprender las necesidades de este grupo poblacional. Las relaciones que se establecen en torno a las TIC, se presentan de forma ambigua y conflictiva. Su clave interpretativa radica en una situación vital atravesada por la tensión entre la expectativa inminente de migración a la ciudad y el deseo del retorno al ámbito rural y familiar.

**Palabras clave:** Jóvenes. Ruralidad. TIC.

## **Entre o desenraizamento e a querência. Juventude rural e TIC no Uruguai. Uma abordagem qualitativa.**

### **Resumo**

Os estudos sobre o acesso e o uso das TICs concentraram-se principalmente no campo urbano, enquanto a juventude rural quase não foi abordada em sua especificidade. Esta pesquisa propôs uma abordagem para a compreensão desse setor populacional no Uruguai a fim de contribuir para sua visibilidade no espaço público. Apresentam-se aqui os resultados do estudo qualitativo de um grupo de jovens rurais uruguaios, composto por alunos do ensino médio agrário da Escola Agrária de Montes. O percurso que propomos parte de um panorama geral sobre a inserção dos jovens na população uruguaia e o acesso às tecnologias de comunicação, bem como a problematização das categorias juventude e ruralidade. O desenho metodológico adota uma abordagem socioantropológica em busca de significados e não de impactos, por meio de entrevista qualitativa. A análise explora dimensões espaciais e temporais da vida cotidiana - tempos de lazer, estudo e trabalho -, sociabilidade, representações e imaginários sobre essas tecnologias e projeções sobre o futuro. Os resultados da pesquisa permitem identificar algumas chaves para compreender as necessidades deste grupo populacional. As relações que se estabelecem em torno das TIC são apresentadas de forma ambígua e conflituosa. Sua chave interpretativa reside em uma situação vital atravessada pela tensão entre a expectativa iminente de migração para a cidade e o desejo de retorno ao meio rural e familiar.

**Palavras-chave:** Juventude. Ruralidade. TIC.

## **1 Introduction**

This paper aims to present the results of a research which general objective was to study the relationship between youth, technology and rurality in Uruguay, through the study of a limited case: a group of youths who attend the Agrarian School of Montes<sup>1</sup>. According to the report of The International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2017), Uruguay is the Latin American country with the best position in the Information and Communication Technology Development Index.<sup>2</sup> However, this favorable position at a regional level, in terms of introduction and use of new technologies, requires the implementation of digital inclusion policies that not only promote access but also employment of new technologies for the development of socially disadvantaged communities (CASAMAYOU, 2012, 2016).

The increase in equipment and extended connectivity, in addition to the implementation of the Ceibal plan<sup>3</sup>, has provoked the decrease of the digital access gap. However, the processes of appropriation of ICTs are associated not only with access, but also with the capacity of users to give them a relevant meaning in their daily life, directly linked to their needs, motivations and interests (WINOCUR, SÁNCHEZ VILELA, 2016). Even though young people are the population sector that uses ICTs the most, it does not necessarily happen in a uniform way. Indeed, these users can give them different meanings and experiment various appropriation processes. The recognition of these differences is an essential factor for a proper definition of public policies that encourage inclusion and development.

Studies on access and use of ICTs have been mainly focused on the urban country and, as a consequence, rural youth have been a population sector scarcely addressed in its specificity.

Our work has the purpose of achieving an approximation to its understanding and contributing to its visibility in public space.

The way that we propose is based on a general overview of the place of young people in the Uruguayan population and the context of access to communication technologies. Later, we explain the adopted theoretical and methodological perspective. This perspective includes the problematization of the categories of youth and rurality. The methodological design adopts a socio-anthropological approach in search of meanings rather than impacts.

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<sup>1</sup> Small population of 1760 inhabitants in the northeast of Canelones province, Uruguay. Even though Montes Agrarian School is placed there, none of Montes' inhabitants studies there.

<sup>2</sup> The 2017 Measuring the information Society report ranks Uruguay in the first place in America Latina, ahead of Argentina and Chile.

<sup>3</sup> The Ceibal Plan ("Basic Informatics Educational Connectivity for Online Learning") is a Uruguayan socio-educational project. It was created by decree of April 18th, 2007 "in order to carry out the necessary studies, evaluations and actions to provide a laptop to each school-age child and each public school teacher, as well as train teachers in the use of that tool, and promote the development of educational proposals in accordance with it. Presidency of the Republic. Decree 144/007. Available :

[http://web.archive.org/web/20140630034353/http://archivo.presidencia.gub.uy/\\_Web/decretos/2007/04/EC579\\_18%2004%202007\\_00001.PDF](http://web.archive.org/web/20140630034353/http://archivo.presidencia.gub.uy/_Web/decretos/2007/04/EC579_18%2004%202007_00001.PDF). Accessed November 30th, 2015.

Finally, some of the research results are presented where some keys can be identified to understand the needs of this population group.

### **Some data on young people in Uruguay and access to communication technologies.**

Uruguay has a highly aged population, which does not reach the three and a half million inhabitants. According to the last census, in 2011, the young population (between 14 and 29 years old) reaches 777,104 people, which represents 23% of the total population. In this population segment the 27.5% are between 14 and 17 years old; 29.1% are between 18 and 24 years old and 43.4% are between 25 and 29 years old and in very similar proportions of men and women, 51.1% and 49.9% respectively (CALVO, 2014, p.10). Within Uruguay, the regions with the highest percentage of young people are, in descending order, the departments of: Montevideo, Canelones, Maldonado, Salto and Paysandú (p.15). Of the total number of young people in Uruguay, 5.1% is considered as dispersed population, 5.5% live in areas with less than 2000 inhabitants and 4.7% in areas between 2000 and 5000 inhabitants. When we observe that same population, linked particularly to the issue of education, the percentage of young people from populations of less than 2,000 inhabitants that declares to be studying, is considerably lower than the populations of more than 5,000 people. This difference becomes more noticeable when considering the age group of young people from 20 to 29 years old.

Regarding access to communication technologies and the internet in young people it is necessary to consider it in the general panorama of digital expansion in the country. The whole of its population has a high internet and associated communication technologies access. According to data from the EUTIC survey <sup>4</sup> in 2019 the number of households with internet connection reached 88% and with fixed broadband 71%. In addition, the number of users of internet according to this work is of 87%, moreover, 9 out of 10 Uruguayans use the internet everyday. The preferred device for connection is the cell phone: 90% of those who connect to the internet on a daily basis, use it. (EUTIC, 2019).

Regarding the socioeconomic and generational level, the digital divide is low and continues to decline. According to the same survey, the internet access gap between households of quintiles 1 and 5 was reduced by half between 2010 and 2019: the gap between households with internet access by income quintile was 66% in 2010 and 29% in 2019. However, as the WIP survey claims (DODEL, AGUIRRE, 2018): “there continues to be a significant access gap in terms of educational and socioeconomic level, where households of high levels double in access to lower ones” (p.12).

Internet and radio are the most relevant media for Uruguayans regarding entertainment and free time. In young people between 18 and 29 years old, 42% use the

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<sup>4</sup> The Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (EUTIC) is carried out by the Electronic Government Agency (Agesic) and the National Institute of Statistics (INE). It is based on personal interviews with a member of the household, resident population over 14 years old in Montevideo and the interior of the country; effective sample: 2341 households; survey period: September and October 2019.

radio in their free time and 59% the Internet. Furthermore, internet use in those under 30 years old is almost universal and reaches 98%<sup>5</sup> (DODEL, AGUIRRE, 2018, p.10-12).

It is necessary to point out that the available data from these studies and from official surveys<sup>6</sup> show exclusively a panorama of the urban country, taking into account populations of more than 5000 inhabitants. Thus, both, the inequality of access and the quality of access regarding the rural context have not been measured with precision. These absences are part of a more general phenomenon, such as SUNKEL (2015) suggests:

Although the culture module commissioned by the OEI (Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture) has considered current youth cultural consumption, it is important to highlight the precariousness of statistics on culture. Because of the absence of time series in this data base, it is not possible to perform analysis neither of trends nor of disaggregations by some sociodemographic variables that make it possible to distinguish between adolescents and young people, or between urban from rural areas (p. 173).

The low production in quantitative and qualitative data, regarding the uses of ICTs in this sector of the population enables to question, then, about the way in which they are linked to these technologies in their specific contexts as well as investigating about the opportunities and obstacles that arise in their lives, to decipher the meanings attributed to them. This case study, attempted an approach to the experience of this population in their relationship with ICTs, from a sociocultural context and specific material.

## 2 Theoretical-methodological perspective.

The youth category has been widely discussed in different disciplinary fields. Thus, in British cultural studies its installation has been critically analyzed as a metaphor for social change and as a theoretical category that standardizes and dilutes differences, particularly the relevance of the difference in social class (HALL and JEFFERSON, 1975-1993). In a similar direction, approaches have been developed in recent years that attempt to understand the plurality of situations and that highlight the various ways of being young (GARCÍA CANCLINI, 2012; REGUILLO, 2010).

On the other hand, youth studies have historically been permeated by the gaze of the adult world: it is the adult who interprets, decodes and finally characterizes the universe of young people, which is essentially represented as the future of society. Consequently, issues that take into account the present of young people and their complexities are neglected. (FEIXA, C, OLIART, P (coords.); (2016.p.20). This approach

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<sup>5</sup> The same survey reveals that the percentage of people aged 60 and over is 56%.

<sup>6</sup> We refer to the INE surveys considering the entire population (EUTIC 2013) and to the one focused on youth (ENAJ 2013). Report "Third National Survey of Adolescence and Youth"-ENAJ 2013-. INJU-MIDES-MTSS\_INE- ISEF\_INM. March 2015. Available:<http://www.ine.gub.uy/documents/10181/66919/tercer-informe-encuesta-nacional-de-juventud2013.pdf/b34b0ab4-9409-4557-a62c-1f313e6420eb>. Accessed April 10th, 2016.

provokes a conception and implementation of policies away from the true needs and concerns of the population in question, a reality that is especially noticeable when considering the rural population. However, there appears to be a sustained attempt to abandon the adult-centered approach to youth culture in order to favor an intergenerational perspective where:

(...) The rules of the game are the result of the interaction between generations- and the culturocentric - culture is the main area in which the public sphere is redefined and, therefore, it is the space for the emergence of new political identities (FEIXA, C, OLIART, P (coords.); (2016.p. 22).

Youth cannot be considered a homogeneous group as long as it covers the multiple experiences that are lived in different sociocultural environments. In that direction, REGUILLO (2010) emphasizes that:

(...) There are two kinds of youths: a majority, precarious disconnected, not only from the information society, but also disconnected or disaffiliated from institutions (education, health, work, security) surviving only with the minimum and another minority connected and able to choose (p. 432).

Rüdiger (2016) also collects the perspective that addresses the diversity inherent to social reality:

It is not possible to define young people as a homogeneous group, but as youth groups that constitute a heterogeneous group, young people with opportunities, difficulties, facilities and power in societies. In this sense, youth is a social construction, it is the production of a certain society originated in various ways, production in which, among other factors, stereotypes, historical moments, multiple references, as well as different and diversified situations of class, gender, ethnicity, group, etc. (p.42).

In the subject that concerns us in this article, we also outline a central distinction: between urban youth and rural youth. Young people is often associated with urban spaces, while young people linked to rural areas are not usually objects of specific study. As a consequence, there is a certain invisibility of this social group. This gaze was in turn fueled by an image of the

youth as disinterested with respect to the rural environment, which has contributed to certain “invisibility of that category as a maker of social identities and, therefore, of social demands ”(CASTRO, et al, 2009, p.23).

It was not until 2000 that the notion of the rural youth as a new political actor arose (SERRANO, 2017, p.55; CASTRO et al 2009). Rurality has been impregnated, then, by processes of invisibility<sup>7</sup> that are historically materialized, both regionally and locally:

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<sup>7</sup> This is manifested, for example, in the 2005 report, “Estado del arte de las investigaciones sobre juventud rural en América Latina, in which Gabriel Kessler points out a theoretical void regarding the category of “rural youth”. This absence refers not only to the academic level, but also to the development of public policies towards the sector (DURSTON, 1997).

(...) This invisibility has as its theoretical epicenter a bias urbanizing any study about the rural, as it is conceived as an archaic instance to be overcome through the modernizing development; That is why there is not an interest to consider it as a specific object. This, added to a consideration of youth as eminently urban, results in a poor development of the rural youth as an autonomous topic of debate, discussion and specific policies, particularly when compared to its urban counterpart. (GONZÁLEZ CANGAS, 2003).

The urbanizing bias meant considering the rural as a mere construct opposed to industrial modernization, typical of the city. In this way, the complex and heterogeneous character inherent to rural youth was minimized. At the same time, a new perception of rural youth as future peasants, continuators of certain lifestyles, who are often associated with a static and old-fashioned reality, anchored in tradition and far from real possibilities of development and progress, emerged (DURSTON, 1996,1997; GONZÁLEZ CANGAS, 2003).

However, at the same time that these perceptions are verified, the emergence of new ruralities has occurred (ESCOSTEGUY, 2019, p. 32-52), based on the expansion of technology and the transformation of lifestyles in which they produce some syncretisms of rural and urban areas. As SERRANO (2017) states:

(...) It cannot simply be said that there is a new rurality or new ruralities, but multiple ruralities, where modern and contemporary representations coexist and constantly transform, showing that representations about rurality are polysemic and transitory, by combining modern and contemporary representations, often in the same subject (p.206).

The identification of that polysemic and transitory character the author refers to, is the one that motivates us to question about the reality of rural youth in Uruguay, in an effort to provide answers about the different ways of living youth and the relationship with technologies that these actors unfold.



Montes Agrarian School. Source: Celeste Borjas.

## Methodological design

The idea of fragmentation and diversity of youth identities requires a multiple approach (FEIXA, OLIART, 2016). The one we propose here is inscribed in the line of audience studies in their contexts of reception, since it is in the consumption and uses processes that young people constitute their identities and their forms of sociability (MORDUCHOWICZ, 2008 and 2012). In these practices, the new sensitivities, tensions and negotiations of meaning as well as the lifestyles as a key to differentiation and belonging are expressed.

We have proposed a study aimed at understanding the consumption of communication technologies as a process which is closely linked to the production of meaning inserted in the subjects' daily life, in a specific situation and avoiding generalizations.

This communication focuses on exposing and analyzing the results of the study of a group of rural Uruguayan youths made up of ten agrarian high school students from the Escuela Agraria de Montes<sup>8</sup>, six girls and four boys between the ages of 15 and 18, living in families whose subsistence depends on rural tasks.

The methodological design adopted a socio-anthropological perspective to rebuild the experience of the subjects and the practical and symbolic meanings in their lives. This methodological decision implies that the meanings that the new and old technologies have for these young people are linked to their social contexts, to the practices in their daily lives, to the imaginary about their condition of young people and about the future.

The selected technique has been the qualitative interview in a semi-structured format and with an ethnographic focus, that is, an interview with a previous guideline based on the in-depth interview (GUBER, 1991, 2001). In addition to the interviews, observation techniques were used in different stages and circumstances of their school routine.

The interview guideline addressed three dimensions of exploration:

1. Spatial and temporal dimensions of everyday life:

Here, we explore the representations and practices about ICTs in relation to work and / or study routines, leisure and free time.

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<sup>8</sup> Its students come from rural areas of Lavalleja, Canelones, Florida and Rocha. We interviewed all of the highschool students who were studying at the School at that time. The young people interviewed attend boarding school from Monday to Friday and return home at the weekend. Regarding the work activities, dedication and collaboration in the lands of their families, of the ten young people interviewed there is a marked difference regarding the time that each of them dedicate to these activities: six actively collaborate in agricultural activities that directly affect the livelihood of their families. Two of them work at the weekends as fair clerks. Two of them do not collaborate with the agricultural activities of their farms. Finally, one of the young girls does not work or collaborate in any of the previously mentioned tasks.



2. Dimension of sociability: individual and shared uses, social relationships and their ties with family, friends, and classmates.

3. Representations and imaginaries about ICTs and their potential as an instrument to improve their short, medium and long term living conditions.

These dimensions were operationally separated for the execution of the research, but they are deeply interconnected and they will be described in that way in the presentation of the results.

### 3 Discussion of some results

#### Interpretive keys to the meaning of uses and practices

The meanings of the new communication technologies, the uses and practices in the rural youth interviewed are linked to a very different life situation from that of young people living in Montevideo, the capital of the country, and to the expectations and representations that these young people have about the future. As stated by VÁSQUEZ WIEDEMAN and VALLEJOS QUILODRÁN (2014) “the expectations of globalizing integration are constituted in imperatives and set the tone for a sustained uprooting in the permanent connectivity and hybridization” (p.93). So the fact of moving to the city is not considered an end in itself but a means for the achievement of accurately set objectives. The uses and meanings that ICTs acquire for this group of interviewees is fundamentally instrumental: they are a way of maintaining contact with the place of origin and to maintain affective ties linked to the home and friends, while nurturing nostalgia for a distant natural environment. Communication technologies work as extensions of the home, connecting the interior and the exterior, a relationship installed in the culture of daily life associated to what SILVERSTONE defines as transitional phenomena (SILVERSTONE 1996). For these young people the cell phone acquires the same meaning that WINOCUR (2008) develops in her research on this technology:

(...) It is essential for maintaining the imaginary cohesion of these safe spaces where our certainties live, because it allows us to exorcise the ghosts of otherness, when it covers us under the protector cloak of a permanent contact with our people (p.177).

However, VÁSQUEZ WIEDEMAN and VALLEJOS QUILODRÁN (2014) argue that:

(...) You can notice a change in the relational dynamics that characterized the symbolic field of rurality, which has defined, in Bourdieu's terms, the creation of a new habitus which, in this case, is expressed in the tendency towards uprooting and estrangement from its original features, all this understood as a symbolic property of the country p.94).

Thus, it is possible to observe a panorama where a certain tension reflected in the need to move away from the comfort zone, from the *terroir*, to begin to materialize

the possibilities of a true personal development. Being far from their homes means the opportunity to face the type of challenges that only unknown territories can offer. The rural environment is seen by these young people as the land which is already conquered, the city, on the other hand, as the territory to be conquered. Is the latter the ideal setting to forge their independence and return to *el pago*<sup>9</sup>, to the place of origin, with the knowledge acquired to improve their families' and their own reality. In this way, feelings of ambiguity are manifested (around an imminent uprooting motivated by the proximity of the emigration to the city), and on the other hand, the expectation of life improvement that this temporary change entails.

"I would like to work in the place where my grandparents worked so hard to have those hectares and make them produce, have animals, as they always had, you know. Maybe I can grow but I can keep that, more or less as usual, that, I would like very much." (Monica, 18 years old, Canelones).

The transitory nature of migration to the city in these youths, is part of the concept of "return migration" (VÁSQUEZ WIEDEMAN and VALLEJOS QUILODRÁN 2014; ILO 2012, p.96). In this kind of migration, the migratory action foresees a later return to the place of origin. It differs from "circular migration", which is defined by a constant coming and going from their places of origin to their places of study and work (p.96).

The idea of changing their environment and moving to the city, appears in the narratives of these teenagers and it is full of ambiguity. They express both hope and concern associated with the difficulty that adapting to changes represents. Somehow, they transmit an idyllic conception of the countryside, linked to tranquility, to freedom, opposite to the chaotic rhythm of urban reality. Archetypal ideas are raised of both contexts, dichotomies that nurture different types of feelings that extend to their life projections and that are assembled with the way they use ICTs:

"I plan to use social networks, use my cell phone, call them. My mother likes me to call her every day because she cares about us, obviously, and I will be more connected to social networks, maybe, because I will be away from them. It is very difficult for me to think that I am going to be away from the country, it is my personal space where you can relax, think what you want, you are free, there's silence, you do not hear anything, not a motor noise, it is not like in the city where you are always hearing noise, it is one of the difficult parts that I see, but I think I can adapt to it" (Armando, 17 years old, Florida).

"The first months I think the telephone is going to be essential for me because I do not know how to locate in Montevideo, I am the worst, so I said "The first thing I'm going to do is recharge \$ 1000 to the "coso" (the cellphone) and walk with the gps but taking that out, I think it's going to be the same or I'm going to have even less time to watch television, for example. (Mariela, 18 years old Canelones) "

In the case of Antonio (15 years old, Canelones), who does not have internet connectivity at home, the idea of a future and better access to internet is seen as beneficial. Inequality in terms of access to communication and information is perceived

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<sup>9</sup> An Uruguayan typical expression that means home for rural people.

by this boy as a disadvantage. In comparison with his peers, the digital divide causes him some discomfort. For him, there is a clear relationship between a greater internet access and more encouraging opportunities.

The contact with the urban world is perceived as a way to social ascent as it allows university training. The use of screens is thus linked to learning, the educational field and the possibility of staying in continuity with their homes. However, in the discourse of the interviews, this positive assessment coexists with a more critical vision when considering the relationship with the community and family. The concepts of home and community are intertwined again with ideas of return, nostalgia for el pago and a fear of being uprooted. In this sense, SILVERSTONE (2004) elaborates a concept of community that allows us to understand these conflicting feelings and relationships:

In a moment a benevolent and neutral observation on village life (...) later, the core of a lament for the loss of everything that is perceived as good and true. We dream of the community. With the common elements and the shared realities that buttress it (p.157).

Connected to this relationship with the community is the idea of home as an area that transcends physical space, endowed with a psychic and emotional charge: “Home as a place of refuge. A place as facilitator as oppressive. A place with limits that must be defined and defended. A place of return. A place from which contemplate the world. Private. Personal. Interior. Known. Mine” (SILVERSTONE, 2004, pp. 144-145). But home is also the result of the dialectic between the inside and the outside, the public and the private, the conscious and the unconscious and the media are centrally involved agents in this dynamic (SILVERSTONE 2004).

Mass media and digital devices then, make it possible to carry part from the most intimate sphere to where we are, regardless of the reasons that have motivated the withdrawal of our original dwellings. SILVERSTONE (2004) wonders about it:

And when we cannot go home? And when we move, displaced by wars, politics or the desire for a better life? With media we can take a part of our home with us (...) The stories about home run like veins throughout the body of social media and those stories are no longer free from the media (p.149-150).

And emphatically he claims: “We still need the myths of the eternal return; and the media are one of their decisive sources” (p.155).

### **Communication technologies, family and community.**

Regarding aspects of interaction and social cohesion, our interviewees do not necessarily conceive technology as an advantage. For them, authentic communication is fostered through the direct dialogue with their neighbors. This is clear in expressions that transmit melancholy in relation to the idiosyncratic way of living in the rural world, when communication was not originally mediated by ICTs. Consequently, these technologies are associated with a sense of eventual threat that endangers the stability

of the relationships of cordiality and closeness, typically linked to rural people. The democratization of access to technologies is projected, in the perception of these teenagers, as a panorama of depersonalization that goes against the uses and customs of their communities, at the same time, it has a disturbing effect due to its negative influence on the family environment:

"And, with technology, I see that customs are a bit lost in the country and the *gurises*<sup>10</sup> with technology look for other things, maybe they encouraged by other things, I don't know, that depends on you too"(Armando, 17 years old, Canelones).

"Technology is going to be more and more present, there will not be a person who does not have a computer at home with internet connection. It will get worse every time because there will be less communication at home, instead of asking about your day?, they will be on their cell phones all day. (Deborah, 18 years old, Canelones).

"It was very common to ask your neighbor for something and spend two or three hours talking to him, and even more, sometimes, and maybe you lose the day of work, but you spend the day with the neighbors, there in Gardel, we are almost all family. Lately we are losing that custom and it's all by whatsapp. You don't have to lose that, that depends on people but I think that in two years, communication will be lost" (Mariela, 17 years old Canelones).

About her younger brother: "It is damaging him because at high school he is doing bad because he never leaves the cell phone. He arrives home and the first thing he grabs is the cell phone and he does not help at home, he does nothing, he is only with the cell phone, my parents call him and ask him to help at home "Juan, you have to leave that". (...) My stepfather is also with the cell phone. And my mom says to him "stop that, that's for the youngest" and they start arguing "(Juana, 17 years old, Canelones).

In this sense, Winocur and Sánchez Vilela (2016) refer to the notion of the symbolic violence that digital devices exert on the domestic habitus. Although the authors consider the computer, it is also possible to establish an analogy with the use of the cell phone:

(...) It constitutes the emblematic symbol of a new form of life which is necessary for the future and social advancement, at the same time, it represents the loss of a certain "way" of doing things (...) when it begins to mediate in family relationships, to change social practices and disturbing the established order" (p.136).

Thus, in the family routines mediated by ICTs, specifically the use of cell phones is presented through contradictory feelings. It is shown as a device that conflicts with certain familiar rhythms or routines, which are considered more desirable and, at the same time, it reveals its usefulness, with an intergenerational playful use, as an instrument of affective proximity, as evidenced by the following testimonies:

"It takes me away from the world. Because if I didn't use the cell phone, maybe I could be sharing moments with my cousins or something like that, but since the

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<sup>10</sup> In Uruguay the word *gurises* is used to refer to girls and boys in an informal context.

perfect day for them is also with the cell phone, we prefer to be with it instead of drinking some mates or something like that, they are worse than me about the cell phone." (Daniela 18 years old).

"Do you know what game we play a lot? "El Preguntados" (Trivia Crack). I like it and I showed it to her one day [her grandmother] ... and she liked it too. And sometimes we compete against each other, we sit one in front of the other, she on her phone and I on mine. Sometimes I say "Hey grandma, Let's play Trivia Crack " "Well, go ahead, she says, and we play until one of us wins "(Mónica, 18 years old, Canelones).

### **The relationship with work, study, leisure and free time.**

The nature of the rural context is perceived as the preferred space as opposed to the online space. This is made explicit in the representations of leisure and free time, in which the new technologies, particularly cell phones, are perceived as distorting since they interfere to direct communication. Therefore, in the descriptions of a funny day, "being disconnected" is central. ICTs are conceived again with an instrumental role, either for arranging a meeting or identifying a location:

"For me, the best days would be like a family birthday party where we share beautiful moments with each other. When we are together like that, we don't turn the TV on , when I was a girl, my dad used to tell me: "no, there are visitors at home now and you can't turn it on ".My parents teach that and I thank them for teaching me that" (Mariela, 18 years old, Canelones).

"For me, a perfect day off would be to go to a Criolla <sup>11</sup>, spending my time with friends, doing what I like, participating in games with horses. (Antonio 15 years old, Canelones).

"Getting up at home, going out with my parents for a walk, to be with my friends, drinking mate, visiting my grandmother. When we are talking, I do not use the cell phone, but when we stop, I start answering whatsapp messages or I enter the networks, Facebook or Instagram. But sometimes, I run out of internet and it is ok". (Veronica 17 years old, Florida).

Regarding the audiovisual culture of rural youth, radio and television have a central place. The first one accompanies rural tasks, it is the medium through which news of local interest circulate, those that refer to traditional events and festivals. In the lives of these teenagers, the radio is always present during the families' working routines and it appears exclusively in those moments. Radio listening is an inherited practice which reflects family tradition and it is also perceived as a shared activity:

"When we work in the greenhouse, the radio is common, we turn it on to make bochinche<sup>12</sup>, because it's like we feel lonely there and we turn on Tala radio to make a mess. (...) The people on that radio show change your mood. Ah! and something that's very important for dad, at six in the morning he always listens to the program about rural issues. They talk about producers , sales and there's always someone to talk

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<sup>11</sup> A typical rural festival.

<sup>12</sup> A word that refers to a noisy and messy situation.

about some topic and dad always explains to me what I don't understand. What I like the most is a program at 11 am on radio Tala, which is a bit silly, and dad also likes it and we comment on what they say, we don't just listen to the radio, we also talk about what they say, right? (Mariela, 18 years, Canelones).

"In the morning we listen to Radio Continental, the one my father listens to, and we listen to it too. And in the afternoon it's 1600 AM. And there are programs that play folk music and talk about the dates of the Criollas and they also inform you about some news" (Antonio, 15 years old, Florida).

Regarding the use of television, half of the interviewees have access to cable TV at their homes. During the week they are at the Agrarian School, where they watch soap operas episodes on the computer. However, watching television continues to be for them mostly a social and family activity. In the following testimony the rituality shared around watching an episode of Game of Thrones is evident:

"You could say that the first episode takes a lot of preparation, it's like a ritual (...) and we all sit down and turn the TV on a few minutes before so as not to miss anything. The ritual, as we call with my father, starts at ten, practically at nine, the world is paralyzed. I prepare the table to eat something, a pizza, I shut the doors to prevent the light from entering so you can watch the TV perfectly, we order a pizza and obviously pizza is always late, which is magical. If the episode starts at ten, the pizza arrives a quarter past ten, it's magical. And the ritual would be that I take a beer with my father and we wait for nothing to interrupt it. (Federico, 17 years, Canelones).

The almost liturgical character that Federico gives at the time of sharing his favorite series, embodies Silverstone's idea about (2004) the importance of the media within the family. Its relevance then resides in the "power that they supposedly have over us at home. They can both destroy and protect the sanctuary" (p153). In the same direction of considering the relevance of the domestic and home environment (SÁNCHEZ VILELA, 2016) there are stories in which the moments of watching films are perceived as an opportunity to share with the family:

"We watch a lot of TV and cowboy movies and stuff like that. In holidays, around six o'clock in the afternoon, we drink mate, mom cooks something, a snack or something like that, we sit in the dining room and begin to watch a cowboy movie or a funny one on TV " (Deborah, 18, Florida).

"And my mother watches a soap opera and sometimes we watch it together. We don't like the same kind of soap operas but we watch them anyway. Now, we are watching Kosem, the Sultana or something like that, and then a Uruguayan program called In Focus which my father and I consider interesting. The tv host explains a lot, you learn, you see new places, you know stories too. And then some movie that we both like, we try to get some, we have similar tastes, almost always action, or an old one, like Cantinflas but that kind of movies are not very usual nowadays". (Alex, 17 years old. Florida).

When analyzing the access-use-appropriation process of ICTs, authors such as Camacho (2001) move away from a linear approach and propose to consider it as a virtuous circle in which the users appropriate the Internet socially, by incorporating its use into their daily activities and when they are able to distinguish when technological

tools, combined with other instruments, become relevant for solving everyday problems and when they do not. We are talking about a strategic kind of process rather than an automated one, a conscious and to some extent, planned process. The type of use to which the author refers, is also appreciable in the narratives of our interviewees, in the sense of adaptation to the circumstance:

"When I'm working I don't use a cell phone but if I have to communicate with my father, who is my helping hand, or if I have any problem in the country, I use it, yeah and to take photos to record the contrast of a dead animal, you take a photo, you identify the animal well so that the date and time remain and then I pass it through whatsapp, to the owner of the establishment, and you put the number of the caravan and that. Or, there are people who sometimes cut your fences to take you cattle and you have to take photos of it, identify it so that they see that you found it cut, is the proof of the crime, everything is recorded" (Armando, 17 years old, Florida).

"Sometimes we use the cell phone to communicate because if we have to go out, because my father is a rural worker, to communicate, to see if we are fine, because there are 2000 hectares where we are, divided into many parts, on windy days, my father does not like wind, then he asks me if I'm okay, or if we found a dead or sick animal, we pass a photo, or we warn each other, or we pass the number of caravan to see which animal died ". (Tamara, 16 years old, Florida).

"On weekends, we divide up the tasks, if one has to monitor the sheep at lambing season, one does that, the other feeds the animals, we share the tasks, it's easier. I carry the cell phone just in case, if there are any complications, I contact my father. (Deborah, 18, Florida).

Thus, the cell phone is inserted into the dynamics of daily life to certain practical and utilitarian actions, but also as tool that enlivens the rural work:

"I arrive on Fridays, I change my clothes and go out to (...), take care of the animals, I wire the fences if I have to (...) And with the cell phone I listen to music, some good folklore, that inspires me more to do things, or when I ride a horse I listen to some folklore, some music haha (Monica, 18 years old, Canelones).

Regarding study routines, these teenagers recognize the advantage granted by ICTs, specifically the computer or cell phone with access to internet, in order to obtain information quickly. However, the kind of reflections that emerge in their stories reveal a relationship of ambiguity and tension between these technologies and what they consider the acquisition of deep learning. For most of them, the computer is somewhat undervalued, when compared to books, establishing a binary relationship of opposition rather than of complementarity. Unlike its technological counterpart, books are conceived as objects whose approach and mastery imply intellectual effort, concentration, and dedication, processes that for these students are associated with the idea of knowledge retention and reliability.

A constant assertion in these rural youths' stories is that the facility provided by the computer with internet access, does not necessarily favor real learning. At a general level, they show a preference for traditional teaching methodologies associated with effort and perseverance, both values, traditionally and historically associated with the time when computers use was not extended. In contrast, the

notion of the book as the object par excellence, of greater reliability and that encourages focus on the task is presented, as opposed to computer navigation, which encourages dispersal.

There is also a certain amount of nostalgia related to the way they used to learn during their childhood, where, for example, the technique of dictation from the teacher arises, who is regarded as an irreplaceable guide and mediator in the teaching and learning processes:

“At school, the teacher would bring me the books, make me read and study and make summaries, but, it was better because we have lost a lot with the computer issue, we get used to the easiest and the things connected to books are lost, like libraries that are less used, a lot has changed.” (Monica, 18 years old, Canelones).

“(…) I learned much more with the style of my teacher Ramón than my sister who is studying with the computer, with the tablets, because when I was in fourth grade you would dictate something to me and I would write it well buy for my sister it is hard to write”(Mariela, 18 years old, Canelones).

“(…) In the past we used books more and you had to reflect more too because when you were looking for something in a book you had to reason it to understand it. For me books are better, because they help you to reason, to understand because even though the computer helps you, it is also bad for you because at the end you don't understand, the only thing you do is to copy”(Tamara, 16, Florida).

These testimonies reflect that access to ICTs is not related to deep learning, which is not possible to acquire without the mediating presence of the teacher.

#### 4 Conclusions

The meaning of communication technologies for this rural youth group are tied to the expectations and representations they have about the future. As we have pointed out, when this dimension is analyzed, two fields of meaning are identified:

On the one hand, the imminent migration to the city, as a place of transit where they can obtain training and experience and on the other hand, in a wider temporary projection, the return to their places of origin, full of that knowledge.

Through the different stories collected, the idea of well-being that familiar things provide, as well as the feeling of protection that home gives, contrasts with a certain feeling of apprehension associated with the future. The tendency of these rural youth to stick to their original surroundings, which allows them to anchor part of their emotionality to a safe environment, to a refuge, is reaffirmed, the love for “la querencia” (el pago) is manifested as the unstoppable tendency to return, after college, to rediscover the security of home and to resignify their spaces.

The notion of return to “el pago” is recurrent in several of the testimonies of the interviewees, who conceive their approach to the city as a mere transitory and instrumental process, which is necessary to get a degree in order to have a better quality of life in their places of origin.



As Vásquez Wiedeman and Vallejos Quilodrán (2014) state in their study on the future expectations of Chilean rural youth:

(...) there are centrifugal forces originating from within the culture of these agroterritories, which expels young people out of their places of origin, on the other hand, centripetal forces such as family, attachment to culture, development and professional expectations, etc., attract individuals back to their origin (pp. 97-98).

In this domain, marked by the ambivalence of emotions, the connection with family is of vital importance and explains the real meaning of ICTs. We are talking about families that, regardless of their composition, are very present in the lives of these teenagers, mainly in the educational matters, This was verified in the different observation stages in the institution, where it was possible to confirm the participation of parents and other relatives in different activities organized by the Agrarian School. They are parents, grandparents and uncles who have made sacrifices to make a living. It is important to highlight that the youths of this study, are, in most of the cases, the first generation to complete high school in order to start university education. In a way, they are the recipients of the dreams and hopes that are forged from the illusion of their families.

The relationships that are established around ICTs are presented in a variable and ambiguous way. On the one hand, getting away from these technologies allow them to reconnect with the environment and with themselves. On the other hand, they make it possible to reconnect with loved ones and blur physical distances in a certain way. The latent ambiguity in these situations bring about a halo of conflict, which is a frequent feeling of discomfort in current ICTs users.

To preserve and protect the communion with the natural environment, and remain in the online world in a balanced way are two scenarios which are difficult to reconcile. How is it possible for these teenagers to establish real contact with their original natural “decontaminated” context if the adoption of ICTs means to be absorbed or at least approximated to the opposite?

On the other hand, how is it possible to transcend their original environments without the use of ICTs and the opportunities they provide? The answers are not in a superficial plane of analysis since they underlie, in part, in the two sides of the same coin.

Paradoxically, through the perception of the interviewees it is possible to observe that it is from the city where opportunities of development and progress come. It seems necessary to adopt the urban as a way of optimizing and validating the rural, which is conceived “(...) as an archaic instance to be overcome through the modernizing development ”(GONZÁLEZ CANGAS, 2003, p.5).

It is possible to notice the archetypal ideas of both contexts these youths develop, they are dichotomies linked to different types of feelings that extend their life projections and that are assembled with the uses and meanings attributed to ICTs.

The idea of tradition is a strong constituent component of the sense of identity of youth and extends to their projection of future life. The way in which our interviewees show a great commitment to keep alive the customs of the countryside is

also clear. This is reflected in their active participation in Criollas and nativist societies. They present a reinterpretation of tradition mediated by technologies that also materializes in their future projections. The photograph of the "gaucho on horseback using a cell phone" frequently appears in the country landscape, a scene in which they also participate. The rural youths see communication technologies as an instrument that favors interpersonal communication to extend invitations to gaucho events or to collaborate in rural tasks and consolidate their self-perception. ICTs take place in their present and also in their vision of the future. However, the instrumental character is the one that predominates and they are used in the sense that they collaborate in the achievement of certain objectives and as long as they do not interfere with aspects of their of personal life, which they consider essential and irreplaceable.

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